DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 534 PS 031 499

AUTHOR	Brinkman, Nancy A.
TITLE	High/Scope Preschool Key Experiences: Language and Literacy. [with]Curriculum Videotape.
INSTITUTION	High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, Ypsilanti, MI.
ISBN	ISBN-1-57379-097-4
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	35p.; Videotape ISBN-1-57379-098-2. For additional booklets and videos in the High/Scope Preschool Key Experiences Series, see ED 441 562, PS 031 455, and PS 031 500.
AVAILABLE FROM	High/Scope Press, 600 North River Street, Ypsilanti, MI 48198-2898 ($9.95, Book FF-P1155; $30.95, Video FF-P1156; $34.95, Set FF-P1157SET). Tel: 800-40-PRESS (Toll Free); Tel: 734-485-2000; Fax: 800-442-4FAX (Toll Free); Fax: 734-485-0704; e-mail: pressstaff@highscope.org; Web site: http://www.highscope.org.
PUB TYPE	Non-Print Media (100) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Child Relationship; Early Experience; *Emergent Literacy; *Language Skills; Listening Skills; *Literacy Education; Parent Child Relationship; *Preschool Children; *Preschool Curriculum; Preschool Education; Story Telling; *Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*High Scope Model

ABSTRACT

During the preschool years, children experience great strides in their ability to use language. This booklet and companion videotape help teachers and parents recognize and support six High/Scope key experiences in language and literacy: (1) talking with others about personally meaningful experiences; (2) describing objects, events, and relations; (3) having fun with language; (4) writing in various ways; (5) reading in various ways; and (6) dictating stories. The booklet discusses each key experience, delineates ways teachers and parents can support children in skills development, and includes a teacher strategy checklist and a list of language and literacy materials. The 60-minute videotape shows adults how they can use the key experiences as a framework to support young children's language and literacy learning. In the first part of the videotape, the narrator introduces each of the key experiences, illustrated with footage of children and teachers in a variety of High/Scope classrooms, designed to help viewers identity key experiences and increase awareness of strategies, such as observing children closely to understand what they are doing and helping children solve problems that arise as they carry out their ideas. The second part of the videotape shows five unnarrated, extended video scenes from High/Scope classrooms as in-depth examples of how key experiences unfold in everyday play situations, such as going to a wedding, reading a story, and making a present. The accompanying viewer guide describes the videotape content, provides a checklist of teacher strategies, and lists additional resources. (KB)

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PRESCHOOL Key Experiences

Language and Literacy

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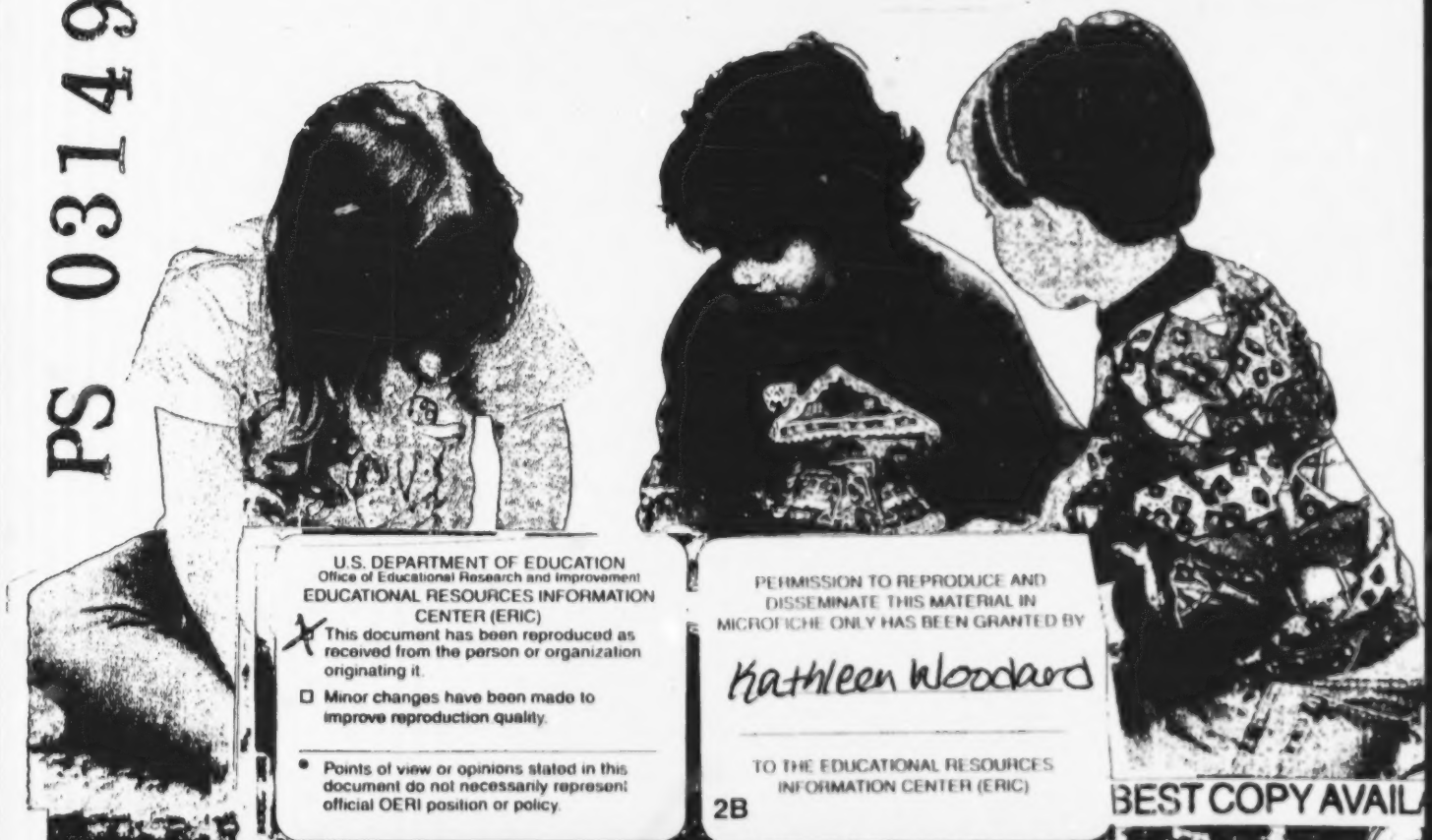

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Language and Literacy

HIGH/SCOPE PRESS

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Related Resources From High/Scope® Press

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High/Scope® Educational Research Foundation. (2000). *Language and Literacy* (video)

Hohmann, M. & Weikart, D. P. (1995). *Educating Young Children: Active Learning Practices for Preschool and Child Care Programs*

Hohmann, M. (1997). *A Study Guide to Educating Young Children*

Published by

HIGH/SCOPE® PRESS

A division of the High/Scope® Educational Research Foundation
600 North River Street
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198-2898

Orders: 1-800-40-PRESS; 1-800-442-4FAX; Web site: www.highscope.org

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The booklets in this series are adapted from sections of *Educating Young Children: Active Learning Practices for Preschool and Child Care Programs* by Mary Hohmann and David P. Weikart, High/Scope Press, 1995.

Nancy A. Brickman: Booklet Writer and Editor;
Linda Eckel, Kazuko Sacks, Profit Makers LLC: Graphic Designers; Gregory Fox: Photographer

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Language and Literacy.
p. cm.
Cover title: High/Scope's preschool key experiences.
On cover: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.
ISBN 1-57379-097-4
I. Language arts (Preschool) I. Title: High/Scope's preschool key experiences.
II. High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. III. Title.

LB1140.5.L3 L33 2000
372.6--dc21 00-58131

Printed in the United States of America

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What is language and literacy for preschoolers?

In the preschool years, children's ability to use language is growing in leaps and bounds. They now enjoy using words to describe experiences they've had, to act out pretend conversations, to make plans, to work out problems with playmates.

Preschoolers also like to play with language: they enjoy jokes, chants, and rhymes, and they often make playful use of words and phrases they've heard from older people. They love listening to and making up stories, and they are also making beginning attempts at reading and writing.

It's important that we learn to recognize and encourage all the ways preschoolers use language, including their early forms of reading and writing.

High/Scope's **six key experiences in language and literacy are** a framework for encouraging meaningful activities that help young children expand their language skills.

The list includes experiences with conversation as well as with books and writing, because both kinds of experiences are crucially important for preschoolers. The abilities of speaking, listening, reading, and writing are intertwined. They develop together and depend upon one another.

To create the best kind of support for language abilities, then, we can't shortchange any one area of language for another. Preschoolers need lots of experiences in speaking and listening, in taking part in everyday conversations, explaining their discoveries, and in using language as part of their play. Just as important, they need lots of exposure to the written word—but not in the form of formal *lessons*.

Key Experiences

Language and Literacy

- ☆ Talking with others about personally meaningful experiences
- ☆ Describing objects, events, and relations
- ☆ Having fun with language: listening to stories and poems, making up stories and rhymes
- ☆ Writing in various ways: drawing, scribbling, letterlike forms, invented spelling, conventional forms
- ☆ Reading in various ways: reading storybooks, signs and symbols, one's own writing
- ☆ Dictating stories

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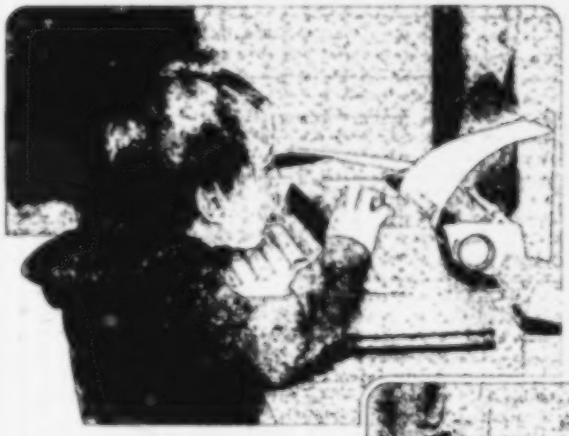
Teachers and parents are usually most concerned about children learning to read and write. Recognizing the importance of these skills, adults are often tempted to "push school downward" by giving preschoolers formal lessons on reading, letters, and phonics. But preschoolers may be bored and uncomfortable if we force academic learning too early—as a result, they may view reading and writing as unpleasant and difficult chores.

A better approach is to give preschoolers *experiences* that help them discover the usefulness and enjoyment of the written word. Children also need to learn that all language activities—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—will bring them closer to the important people in their lives. Language learning is about *communication*, about the ways we connect with each other. So if we want young children to expand and develop their language skills, we need to provide language opportunities that are warm and personal.

In the following pages we discuss each of the key experiences in language and literacy, and provide suggestions for supporting each one.

The opportunity to explore books makes children want to read.



This child discovers a neat way to make letters.

Language brings us closer to the people around us.

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Key Experience

☆ Talking with others about personally meaningful experiences

Children's language develops when they are talking about experiences that are important to them. These can be exciting experiences ("I jumped in the puddles!"), upsetting experiences ("Marianne took my blocks!"), or imaginary experiences ("I'll be the mommy dinosaur, you be the baby dinosaur"). The important thing is that the language comes from the child and grows from the child's experiences and interests. Such experiences motivate children to expand their skills in expressing themselves.

Examples of children

Talking with others about personally meaningful experiences

- Raymond came into preschool and excitedly told everybody, "I had my birthday party and we went bowling." He went on to demonstrate how they bowled and to describe strikes, spares, and other aspects of his bowling party.
- Natalie said to Mary, her teacher, "I went swimming in the big water but I was afraid." When Mary replied that she was afraid of big water, too, Natalie said, "You're not afraid 'cuz you're bigger."
- Noticing that Raymond was crying, James came up to him and put an arm on his shoulder. James said, "Sometimes when I feel like this it helps me to take a deep breath."
- At work time Cassie and Sue (the teacher) put together the red block puzzle. Cassie said, "I wish my mom was here. She's the expert."

Describing upsetting feelings is a language-building experience.

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Ways to support children in talking with others about personally meaningful experiences

Create a climate in which children feel free to talk.

Welcome children's talk throughout the day, not just at "sharing times" or "free play" times. Accept and encourage children's enthusiastic communications whenever and wherever they happen. Do the following to encourage children to talk freely about their experiences.

- **Position yourself where children are.** Sit on the floor, or next to them at a table. Two-way conversation is difficult if you are towering over children.

- **Listen carefully to children's talk.** Look directly at children and "tune in" to what they're saying.

- **Show you are interested in what children are saying by making occasional comments.** These can be simple acknowledgments like "I see," "Hmm" or "Uh-Huh."

This adult "tunes in" to the child, staying with the child's topic and responding in a playful tone.

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• **Occasionally, repeat back or restate the child's words—this encourages the child to tell you more.** For example, after the child has shared something with you, make a comment like the following: "So, you went bowling last night with your dad?" "So the problem is, Cassie took the tower block you needed for your castle?"

• **Let the child "set the agenda" for any conversation.** Follow the child's topic and pace. You can contribute your own ideas, but make sure they relate to the child's topic. For example, if a child tells you about a video he liked, you might reply, "So you liked the new Tigger video. I liked to read about Tigger a lot when I was little."

• **Don't ask a lot of questions.** Questions like "How old are you?" or "What season is it?" can kill a conversation with a child—such questions can make children feel they are being quizzed. If you do ask a question, it should be related to the topic the child has introduced and it should express your *genuine* interest in knowing the answer. For example, if a child has told you about her plan to play football with friends, you might say "So, you all are playing football and your team is the Lions. Are you going to set up goal posts like you did yesterday?" A useful alternative to questioning is to rephrase a question as a comment. Instead of asking questions that start with how, what, or why, rephrase them as comments: ("I wonder how you will fasten the string to the doll.") These kinds of nondirective comments encourage children to *explain* their thoughts and plans.

By listening respectfully and occasionally restating what the child says, the adult encourages her to find words for her thoughts.

Conversation flows naturally when children help each other with large or heavy materials.

Encourage children to talk to one another.

Conversations with other children are just as important as those with adults. Try these suggestions to encourage child-to-child conversations:

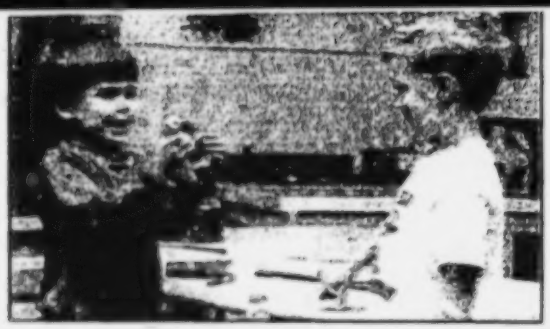
• **Provide materials and spaces that encourage children to play together.** Pretending often involves lots of talking, so make sure your **block and house areas** (and other favorite locations for pretend play) are large, comfortable, and well-stocked with **pretend play props**: tools, utensils, dress-up clothes, furniture. Be sure you have some **large and cumbersome items** in your center, to force children to work together to move and position them (talking will naturally follow). Provide **large containers that children can work together to fill and empty**—this also encourages conversation. Make available a wheelbarrow, wagon, or an appliance box. Have everybody pitch in to fill up the water table. **Water-related materials** (buckets of water and brushes, water table, sponges, water toys) are also natural conversation-starters.

Materials for a pretend hairstyling salon encourage lots of talk.

• **Help children's conversations stay alive by offering your services as a conversational link.** For example,

— **Refer one child to another for help** ("I noticed Mun was using the stapler yesterday. Maybe he can show you how he made it work").

— **Restate what one child has said to another** ("Maurice says he doesn't like it when you use the train so close to his tower, Dionne").



Key Experience

☆ Describing objects, events, and relations

This key experience focuses on children's *descriptive* language abilities. With opportunities and practice, children make their language more accurate, precise, and detailed.

As children attempt to explain their thoughts and describe their experiences, they are expanding their vocabularies. They are learning the words that stand for objects and places: *sand table, block area, screwdriver, grapefruit*

Examples of children

Describing objects, events, and relations

- At greeting time Raymond explained bowling to James, "A spare is when you don't knock them down and you throw the ball again and knock them all down."
- Raymond told Mary, his teacher, "You are not as smart as a first-grade teacher. They have to be much smarter than you because they teach kids to read."
- Noticing that James had three Cheerios stuck together, Matthew said, "That's a **triple**. Three is a triple, two is a double, and one is a Cheerio."
- After Nabil had washed his hands for snack, he splashed water on his face and said, "I like it. Water tickles me."
- When Jabari said he needed more rubber stamps, Cassie responded, "Do you want to borrow some of mine? Okay, but that doesn't mean **keep**!"

*The words **tall** and **taller** are more meaningful if you've "measured up" with a friendly adult.*

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A chance to stroke a horse's tail is likely to lead to interesting conversation. Children may use words like **soft**, **smooth**, *and* **shiny** *as they try to describe how the horse's tail looks and feels.*

Planning is a good time to encourage descriptive talk.

juice. They are also learning the words and phrases that describe positions, locations, and time relationships: *in, under, behind, inside of, tomorrow, a week ago;* those used to describe relationships that involve people: *Jason's mom, my father's hat, Sandy's baby brother, Grandma's house;* and words that describe feelings: *I feel happy, I'm angry at you.*

Children's use of descriptive language, like the other language key experiences, starts with children's experiences and actions. Children expand their descriptive skills because they want to communicate their discoveries about the world. This process can't be created artificially through vocabulary drills or adult "quiz questions."

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Ways to support children in expanding their descriptive language

Remember that interesting materials and experiences lead to interesting talk.

If you have a wide variety of materials and lots of things for children to do, you are already supporting children's descriptive talk— children are naturally inspired to talk about things that intrigue or excite them.

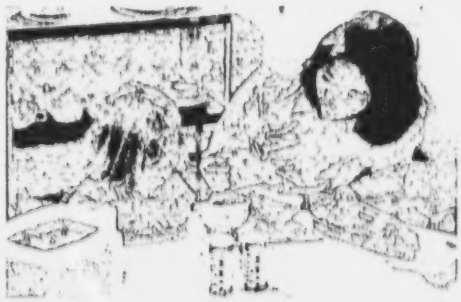
Make sure your materials invite exploration and comparison: for example, instead of a matched set of dolls, provide dolls made of different materials, in different sizes, with a range of clothing and skin colorings. Instead of having so many items made of plastic, make sure you include things made of wood, stone, fiber, and other natural materials. The richness of your materials will stimulate children to notice and talk about shapes, textures, and other details.

A water table filled with snow sparks a lively conversation

Listen as children describe things in their own way.

Pause and be patient as children search for the "right word"—this lets children know you value their descriptions. For example, Rosie the teacher sits quietly and listens as Sheronda haltingly describes a picture she is painting. Rosie makes occasional comments to encourage her to continue her description.

Sheronda: It's . . . a picture of my mom. It's . . . rain.
Rosie: So that's your mom, and it's raining.
Sheronda: She's . . . she's. . . she's . . . it's wet. There's rain and . . . she doesn't have a hat.
Rosie: Your mom's getting wet.
Sheronda: And there's . . . grass *(pointing).*
Rosie: So here's the grass.
Sheronda: It's wet.
Rosie: The grass is getting wet, too.



Give children plenty of time to express themselves.

Accept children's descriptions and labels even though they may not be "correct" by adult standards.

For example, Lucy says to Jocelyn, her teacher, "Yesterday we went to the museum." Jocelyn knows the trip to the museum was two weeks ago, but doesn't point this out. Instead she responds, "You went to the museum. I remember that."

Encourage children to talk about their plans.

Planning time is a good opportunity to encourage descriptive language. Make open-ended comments and ask occasional questions that encourage children to name materials and activities, explain time sequences, and add details to their plans. Here are some examples of planning time questions and comments that encourage children to explain and describe what they plan to do:

Where will you be working today?

Which blocks will you be using for your robot? . . . Oh, the long ones?

So you and Kayla are going to be bears who are having a party? . . . What kind of party? . . . Will there be any special food?

So you'll be using the bumpy paper to make your snake. I wonder what else you'll be using?

I wonder how you're going to fasten the eyes to your mouse?

Encourage descriptive language as part of games you play with children.

For example, if you are playing a guessing game, you might say "I'm thinking of an animal that has feathers and wings." Then encourage children to take turns making up their own descriptive clues and having everybody guess the animal. Another descriptive game is "I Spy": "I spy somebody who's wearing a blue hat and a ruffled scarf."

In this planning game, partners "call" each other to describe their plans.

Key Experience

☆ Having fun with language: listening to stories and poems, making up stories and rhymes

Learning that spoken and written language can be a source of fun and entertainment is what this key experience is all about. These playful experiences with language should not be thought of as trivial—actually, they are one of the foundations on which children's literacy is built. Research shows that, in particular, listening to stories being read aloud is the single most important way that adults can prepare preschoolers for later success in learning to read.

As well as reading to preschoolers, it's also important to encourage

Examples of children

Having fun with language

- As Jabari was working in the block area, he said to Nabil, "What did one building say to the other building? Knock me down!"
- Chelsea's plan for the day was to lead the group in acting out **The Gingerbread Man** at large-group time. When large-group time came, she assigned roles to each person in the group. Then she told the story as the children acted out their roles.
- At clean-up time, James went around to various children and said, "When Rosie [the teacher] asks what you did at work time, say, "I went to the **blah, blah, blah** area." At recall time, several children in James's group did just that, and everyone found this very funny.
- To encourage word play at snack time, Rosie started a chant, "Willaby Wallaby Wups, who's passing out the cups?" Janelle responded, "Willaby Wallaby Woose, Who's passing out the juice?"

Playful experiences with language help children develop awareness of speech sounds

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Reading to just a few children at a time makes hearing a story a warm and personal experience.

them to play with the *spoken* word. They need to listen to and make up rhymes and chants, to experiment with words as part of their play. One reason for encouraging children's word play is that it helps them develop *phonological* awareness. This is the ability to recognize the wide range of sounds and rhythms that make up speech. This *awareness* of word sounds becomes important later on when children begin to connect the sounds of spoken language with the letters they see on the page.

At the preschool level, however, we don't need to worry about children connecting letter and word sounds with written symbols. It's more important to give them plenty of experience just listening to and repeating the sounds of speech in the context of playful, enjoyable activities. While word play may seem like "talking nonsense" or "baby stuff" to some adults, this kind of experience is valuable and important for children.

Ways to support children in having fun with language

Recognize and encourage children's word play.

Often you will notice children repeating word sounds. For example, a child says, "Rmmm, rmmm, rmmm" as she starts a pretend car. This kind of language play helps children become familiar with the various sounds that can be heard in a word. This awareness of the individual sounds of spoken language is important, because later on children learn to connect these sounds with the letters and groups of letters that stand for them. Other kinds of word play that children enjoy include making up silly names and telling jokes.

You can support children's playful use of language by repeating what the child says, taking part in the play and adding your own variations, or just listening appreciatively. For example, when Marcus told Michelle, his teacher, a "knock-knock" joke, she played along with it, making a mental note to devote some time to joke-telling at large-group time later that day.

Cozy beanbag chairs in the book area invite children to pause for frequent "story breaks."

Read to children at every opportunity, and make reading a cozy experience.

- **Incorporate story reading in the regular flow of your day.** Read before and after naps, at snacks, at work time, any time children feel like hearing a story. For example, reading and exploring books together can be a comfortable, informal way to start the day in the preschool. As children come in, encourage them to join one of the teachers in the book area. This teacher can read stories as children request them, as well as encourage children to "read" or explore books on their own. Make parents welcome to stay and read for a few minutes with their own child or other children at this time.

- **Throughout the day, whenever possible, read to just one child individually or to a few children at a time.** Reading to no more than a few children at a time makes hearing a story a warm and intimate experience, and

encourages children's positive associations with reading. Reading in a large group not only is less personal but also makes it difficult for adults and children to talk about what they are reading. If you've ever had a chance to observe large-group reading, you've probably noticed that the children who are not near the adult sometimes tune out or become restless or even disruptive.

Therefore, as you read to children, sit on the floor so children can cluster around you and make your lap available to small visitors. Read in a leisurely way, stopping for children's questions and comments. Encourage children to talk about the book you are reading.

Select a wide range of books to share with children, including some that relate to children's current activities or interests.

Choose some books because children request them, and some because you want to introduce them to children. Be prepared to re-read children's favorites over and over again.

Tell and make up stories; recite poems, rhymes, and chants with children.

Tell familiar stories that you know, or make up your own stories for and with children. Embellish your story with gestures and motions, and encourage children to join in. Use props and puppets as storytelling aids, and pass around a basket of these story accessories so children can join in the fun as you tell a story.

Children listen to stories inside a tent.

To make up a story with a small group, provide the first line as a story starter, then have other children add to the story, and have the group repeat what went before. For example, start a story by saying "One day a little old witch was out walking her dog. When she got to the playground she saw . . . ".

At group times, recite chants and rhymes with children, including those you make up. For example, after a field trip to an ice cream parlor, you and the children could make up a chant about the experience, with each taking a turn making up a line, and the whole group repeating each line: "We got ice cream, we got ice cream, Raymond got a sugar cone, Raymond got a sugar cone, Corey got mint chip, Corey got mint chip, Kayla got sprinkles, Kayla got sprinkles . . . ".

Key Experience

☆ Writing in various ways: Drawing, scribbling, letterlike forms, invented spelling, conventional forms

Children learn to write by writing in their own ways: by drawing pictures or making scribbles that they identify as writing, or by attempting to imitate or copy letter forms that they recognize from their own names or from the print in their environments. We support all these kinds of writing activities, whether or not they result in recognizable letters or words. The results of these early

Examples of children

Writing in Various Ways

- To indicate her wish to pass the snack basket at snack time, Natalie wrote the letters E i A on the snack chart next to some circular shapes.
- At small-group time, Apu wrote an x in his notebook, along with many scribbles.
- At planning time, Natalie used a pencil to make rounded marks on a Post-It note. She said that the marks spelled her name. She asked Rosie (the teacher) to write her symbol, an ice cream cone, on the same note. Natalie then posted the note on the computer to indicate her plan to work there.
- Samuel and Mun were pretending to play football in the circle area. They made large numbers and taped them to the backs of their "uniforms."
- Midori wrote her name and symbol on an index card and then asked Rosie how to spell the words "I had a good day at school." She wrote the words as Rosie spelled them for her.

Large wooden letters are part of a "print-rich" environment

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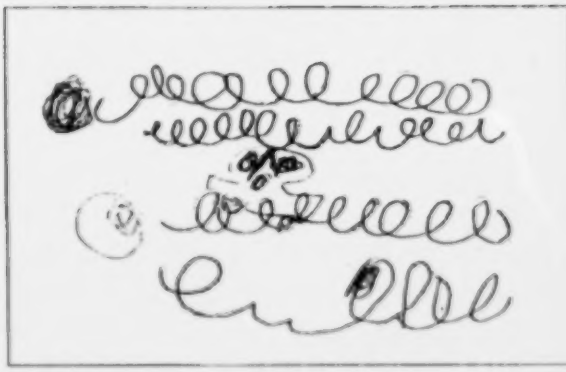
Writing in her own way, a child makes a greeting card. More examples of children's early writing forms are shown at right.

attempts to write are not seen as mistakes but as children's ways of expressing interest in the mechanics of writing and in using writing to communicate.

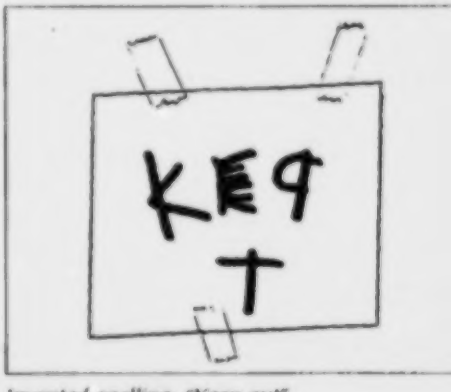
If you encourage children to continue trying to write, their "writing" will eventually become more like "correct" or "real" writing. The adult's job is to encourage this gradual process, not to point out mistakes or directly teach children their letters. Of course, if children ask you how to write specific letters or words, by all means help them. Having many examples of hand-lettered print throughout the room will also enable children who are interested to make or copy letters on their own.



Scribbles

Letterlike forms

Random letters



Invented spelling: "Keep out"

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Ways to support children as they write in their own ways

Provide all kinds of writing and drawing materials in several areas of the classroom, not just in the art area or writing center.

Provide a wide selection of **writing tools**: pencils, markers, wipe-off pens, computers, typewriters, large-sized chalk for writing on the sidewalk outside. Make available a wide range of **writing surfaces**, including paper in various shapes, sizes, and textures; dry-erase boards; chalkboards; materials for bookmaking; empty books and greeting cards; Post-it notes. Provide **materials that encourage children to include writing in their pretending** (for example, recipe cards in the house area and order pads in your pretend store).

A typewriter in the house area encourages children to include writing in their pretending.

Be ready to recognize children's early writing forms.

On page 17 are examples of the stages in the development of children's writing. Not all children will go through all these stages in this order. The important thing to remember is that all these writing forms represent an important step forward for the child; as such, they should be valued and encouraged by adults. Be enthusiastic as you see these writing forms emerge; point them out to parents, and explain to them your positive approach toward children's early writing attempts.

Encourage all the ways children write.

Here are some examples:

- If Suresh makes a few scribbles on a wipe-off board and tells you it is a story about a boy and a fish, encourage him to tell you more of the story or to add to his own "writing."

• If Keegan makes a birthday card for his mom and writes an *M* on it, along with some letterlike forms, encourage him to send it home to show his mom. In the days that follow, encourage him to make greeting cards for other occasions that arise.

• If Sheronda is beginning to copy specific letters and asks for your help, show her how to make the letters she needs. And make sure there are plenty of wooden and plastic letters available in the art area so she can use them independently. If she is interested, help her use a children's word processing program or typewriter for further writing.

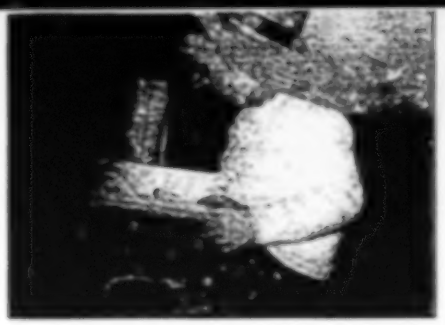
Encourage children to use writing as part of their play or as a way of communicating important messages.

Be alert to the "writing possibilities" in all kinds of play. If children are planning a "football game," encourage them to write letters or numbers to identify their team uniforms or helmets. If there is a puppet play, encourage ticket-making. If Ashley has just whipped up a stack of play dough pancakes for you, smack your lips as you eat them, and ask her if she can write down the "secret recipe." If children constantly forget the playground rule about riding bikes near the swings, encourage them to make a special sign to place near the swings as a reminder.

Encourage children to use writing at planning or recall times.

At some planning times, ask children to write their plans, as well as tell you about them. Encourage them to write in their own ways, using drawings, scribbles, letterlike forms, symbols, or actual words and letters. You may suggest that they include symbols in their written plans, such as their personal symbols or symbols for the interest areas that you have written on a planning sheet (for more on symbols, see pp. 23–24).

Children "write" their plans using forms with interest area symbols.



Key Experience

☆ Reading in various ways: Reading storybooks, signs and symbols, one's own writing

Children's early reading takes many forms. For the preschooler, "reading" can mean any of the following:

- Exploring the pages of a book and looking at the pictures
- Pretending to be a mama bear reading a bedtime story to baby bear
- Telling a familiar story from memory while turning the pages of the storybook
- Recognizing a "stop" sign, the symbol for "ladies restroom" in an airport, or the symbol for a chain store or fast-food restaurant
- Picking out familiar letters or actually reading a simple word such as "Mom" or "No."

While many people would only consider the last to be a true example of reading, we consider all these child behaviors to be early forms of reading. They all represent important steps forward in the process of learning to read and should be enthusiastically encouraged.

Knowing the importance of reading, adults are often tempted to "jump start" the process by giving children premature lessons in letters or phonics. Unfortunately, these too-academic lessons

Examples of children

Reading in various ways

- At work time, Cassie and [another child] curled up on the red beanbag chair in the book area. Cassie told the story **The Lady With the Alligator Purse** while turning the pages of the book.
- On the class message board, there was a drawing of a birthday cake with Sue's symbol, an arrow, on it. Amir was the first to "read" the message. "It's Sue's [the teacher's] birthday today!" he called out.
- The teachers had supplied children with small-wipe off boards, and Jabari drew spirals of blue on his. Pretending to read from it, he said, "I went to the movies and . . . ."
- Jason said, "I know what **S-H-E-L-L** spells—gas!"

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"Talking through" a story as an adult points to the pictures is one way young children "read."

can be self-defeating, since children need to have many exploratory experiences with books and reading first.

While we often think of reading as the process of simply decoding the letters and words on a page, we often forget that there are many things children must learn *about* reading that are just as important as learning *how* to read. Before children actually begin to decode words and letters, they must develop some awareness of how reading works, what it is used for, and some of the common practices that are part of reading.

For example, they are learning that print is actually "talk written down," that the symbols they see on the pages stand for the words they hear and use in conversation. They are also learning that writing, unlike speech, is a permanent form of language that is always the same each time it is read. They are beginning to understand some of the reasons why we read: to help us remember things; to learn important news or receive messages from others; to entertain ourselves; to decide what to order in a restaurant; to find out important information or instructions.

Preschoolers are also beginning to learn about standard behaviors that are part of reading, such as turning pages, reading from the front to the back of the book, reading from the top to the bottom of the page, handling books with care. They also are learning where print is found: in books, newspapers, on the computer, on tickets, menus, order forms, instructions, food boxes, signs.

Reading from top to bottom is a "reading convention" children learn as they explore books.

Children are learning all these important and valuable things *about* reading just as they are beginning to learn those things we normally think of as "learning to read"—recognizing letters, letter sounds, and words. They are discovering all these things as they explore books, "read" pictures and symbols, pretend to read, and incorporate reading into their play. The following suggestions encourage all these aspects of the process of learning to read.

Ways to support children in reading in all kinds of ways

Surround children with the written word.

To help children learn about the importance of reading in daily life, create a "print-rich" environment. Use books and a wide variety of print materials throughout the center (not just in the book rack). For example:

- **Book and reading area:** A rotating selection of storybooks, magazines, story tapes, message board (see p. 29).
- **Computer area:** Storybook computer programs; programs that include words but don't depend upon children reading them.
- **House area:** Print materials to include in pretend play: cookbook, recipe box, tickets, phone book, magazines, baby books, junk mail, empty food boxes and plastic jars with product names and package information.
- **Block and toy areas:** Original toy boxes; instructions and model diagrams from building sets; maps; alphabet puzzles; toy signs.
- **Woodworking area:** Toy catalogs, how-to books, measuring tape with large numbers.
- **Art area:** Letter blocks and stencils, magazines, catalogs, old greeting cards.
- **Outdoor area:** Signs, large chalk, seed packets.
- **Throughout the center:** Signs and labels to show the different areas of the classroom and where materials are stored. These signs and labels may include symbols and pictures, and a few words (but children shouldn't have to read the words to understand them.)

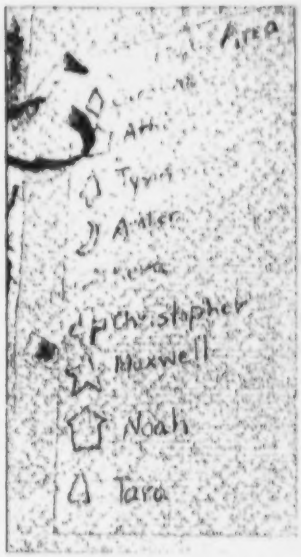
Children read together at the computer.

Look for things to read with children.

When you are outdoors or on a field trip, point out print to children—the banner behind a blimp, common road signs, license plates, the lettering on a truck, the labeling on packages in a store. Encourage children to identify letters and symbols or guess what the words say.

Provide each child with a personal symbol.

Symbol or picture reading is one of the early ways children read. To encourage this, give each child a symbol to use as a personal identification mark. Symbols should be simple, recognizable shapes that are easy for adults and children to copy: a half moon, a boat, a triangle, a tree. Use children's symbols on their cubbies, coathooks, on a classroom chore chart, on children's artwork. Encourage children to read the symbols, and to add them to their own creations. For example, if Lonnie decides to make a get well card for his friend James, who is absent, encourage him to put James's symbol, an arrow, on the outside of the envelope and to sign the card with his own personal symbol, a bird, and a *J* (the only letter he knows in his name).



Each child in the classroom has a personal symbol

Use a message board to encourage picture and symbol reading.

On a large wipe-off board, a chart pad, or a chalk board, post a few simple messages each day. The messages can be about classroom events, new materials added to the classroom, visitors, child and teacher absences, and so forth. Develop a simple picture vocabulary of common symbols that everyone in the classroom can use and understand. For example, a rectangle shape stands for the block area, a red circle with a diagonal line inside means "no" or "not."

To create messages you can combine these symbols with simple line drawings, stick figures, and photos. Examples of messages:

- A question mark over the symbol for the block area stands for "Guess what's new in the block area today."
- A "no" or "not" symbol (red circle with a diagonal line) taped to a picture of the school means "No school tomorrow."

At the message board, children pretend to write the messages for the day

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- A picture of a basket with Jason's personal symbol under it means "Jason's turn to pass the snack basket today."

Bring the whole group together at the beginning of the day to "read," guess, and discuss the day's messages.

Reciting a memorized story is another way children "read."

Provide storybooks for children to explore and "read," alone and together.

Make sure that children understand that reading is not an "adults-only" activity—they are readers, too. Include wordless books, photo albums, books that children are familiar with, new books that you want to introduce, and many other kinds of illustrated books in your book corner. To stimulate children to explore books independently, choose books that relate to recent classroom events or to particular interests of children that you know about.

Occasionally, encourage children to "read" to you or to their friends. If Monica asks you to read her a familiar story, ask if she can read it to you instead. Explain that any way she reads it will be fine. (Monica may, for example, recite parts of the story from memory, "talk through" the book and point to the pictures, silently turn the pages, tell the story, or make up another story.) Support Monica's chosen way of reading by listening with interest, commenting, or joining in when appropriate.

Encourage children to read back their own "writing."

Often children write on their artwork, make storybooks or greeting cards, or write things as part of pretend play. Regardless of the form of the child's writing (scribbles, letterlike forms, or real words or letters), encourage the child to read it back to you. For example, Rosaria had made some scribbles mixed with X's and numbers on a note pad she was using as part of her doctor play. She identified the notes as "temperatures" and "medicines" (prescriptions). Her teacher said, "Stephen looks pretty sick. What is his temperature, doctor?" Rosaria replied, checking her pad, "Twenty-two."

Key Experience

☆ Dictating stories

When reading and writing are a familiar part of children's surroundings, they often ask adults to write things down for them. Dictating words for the adult to write down is another important key experience. For example, children may ask the adult to write for them on their drawings or paintings or to fill in the message area of a greeting card they have made. Children may also enjoy having the adult record their plans or a story they've made up.

This key experience is important because it helps children understand the relationship between spoken and written language; it also encourages children's descriptive language; when they know the teacher is writing down what they say, they often take extra pains to describe their thoughts and experiences.

Examples of children

Dictating stories

- At work time, while Raymond and Mary (the teacher) were playing in the block area, Raymond commented, "I like donuts better than cookies. Please write it down."
- A group of children had been pretending to be wrestlers. The play had occasionally led to conflicts among the children, so the children decided to come up with a list of "wrestling rules." They dictated the list of rules to Eileen (the teacher), who posted them in the circle area.
- Janelle drew a picture, then dictated the following caption for Barbara, the teacher, to write: "This is my mother's water bed. It's dripping."
- Children took an "architectural walk" through the neighborhood in which the teachers encouraged them to focus on the visual aspects of the houses they saw. During the walk, Rosie (the teacher) wrote down some of the comments children made about what they saw. Afterwards, Rosie read back children's exact words to encourage them to discuss their experiences further. She wrote down additional comments made in the discussion, then made a class book about the experience by combining all the transcriptions of the children's comments with their drawings of the walk.

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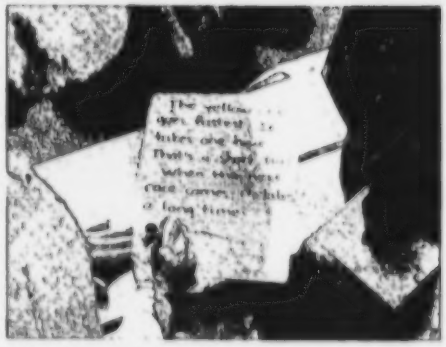
Ways to support children in dictating stories and messages

Write down the child's exact words—without correction or editing. As you write, repeat the child's words aloud.

This helps to make the connection between speech and writing clearer for the child. You may want to send the dictation home for the child to share with parents or to collect children's dictations in a class book.



The adult writes down the child's exact words.

Make dictation a part of group writing efforts.

Dictation can be very useful in group activities because it provides a means for bringing together everyone's contributions. For example, a small group can write a story together about a field trip they just took, with each child contributing a sentence or two and the teacher writing down the children's words.

Or, sometimes children may develop rules for a game they've made up, which they will then ask the teacher to write down. Dictation can also be used to help the group focus on a problem they are discussing. For example, one teacher conducted a small-group discussion of the problem of children running in front of the swings. The teacher wrote down the suggestions the children made for dealing with the problem, then read their dictations back to them as a reminder about what to do in the future. She saved the dictation to refer back to later, in case the swing problem came up again.

After a neighborhood walk, the teacher will write down the children's story about what they saw.

See the checklist, next, for a summary of what to do to encourage language and literacy. A materials list is given at the end of this booklet.

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Language and Literacy
Key Experiences CHECKLIST: WHAT TO DO

★ Talking with others about personally meaningful experiences

___ Establish a climate in which children feel free to talk.
___ Be available for conversation throughout the day:
  ___ Place yourself at the children's physical level.
  ___ Listen carefully to what children are saying.
  ___ Give children control of conversations.
  ___ Accept children's hesitations and nonverbal utterances.
  ___ Learn and remember each child's particular interests.
___ Encourage children to talk with one another throughout the day:
  ___ Provide opportunities for cooperative projects and play.
  ___ Support children who wish to plan and recall together.
  ___ Refer one child's questions and problems to another child.
  ___ Interpret and deliver messages.
  ___ Explain the context of children's statements.
  ___ Acknowledge conflicting viewpoints.
___ Converse with *all* children:
  ___ Make time to talk with children.
  ___ Look for comfortable opportunities for dialogue.
  ___ Be aware of your personal preferences.

★ Describing objects, events, and relations

___ Provide children with interesting materials and experiences.
___ Listen as children describe things in their own way.
___ Encourage children to talk about their plans.
___ Let children be the leaders in "describing" games.

★ Having fun with language: listening to stories and poems, making up stories and rhymes

___ Listen to children throughout the day.
___ Read to children individually and in small, intimate groups.
___ Tell stories, recite poems and rhymes.
___ Make up stories, chants, and rhymes.

★ Writing in various ways: drawing, scribbling, letterlike forms, invented spelling, conventional forms

___ Provide a variety of writing and drawing materials.
___ Anticipate various emergent forms of writing:
  ___ Drawing
  ___ Scribbling
  ___ Letterlike forms
  ___ Invented spelling
  ___ Conventional forms

___ Encourage children to write in their own way:
  ___ Ask children to write stories.
  ___ Encourage children to write to one another.
  ___ Accept children's additions to your writing.
___ Display and send home samples of children's writing.

☆ Reading in various ways: reading storybooks, signs and symbols, one's own writing

___ Provide a print-rich environment:
  ___ Stock the interest areas with reading materials.
  ___ Look for things to read outside.
___ Provide each child with a personal symbol.
___ Provide storybooks for children to read.
___ Encourage children to read to one another.

☆ Dictating stories

___ Write down children's personal dictations.
___ Write down group dictations.
___ Save dictations and encourage children to act out their experiences.

Action games, rhymes, and chants are an opportunity to have fun with language.

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Materials for Language and Literacy

Book and writing area materials

Furniture and equipment

Forward-facing book rack
Beanbag chairs or other "comfy" furniture
Cassette tape recorder and story tapes

Books, stories, and other things to read

Storybooks illustrated with drawings, paintings, and photos
Nonfiction books (books about animals, houses, vehicles, places, etc.)
Wordless books
Folk storybooks
Predictable-format books
Poetry books
Concept books
Alphabet books
Home-made and child-made books
Photo albums of children in your program and their families
Storybooks showing people of all races, ages, and physical abilities
Storybooks reflecting the experiences of single-parent, two-parent, and extended families
Books in the home languages of children in your program
Children's magazines, such as *Faces: The Magazine About People, Cricket, Chickadee, Ranger Rick, National Geographic World*

Storytelling materials

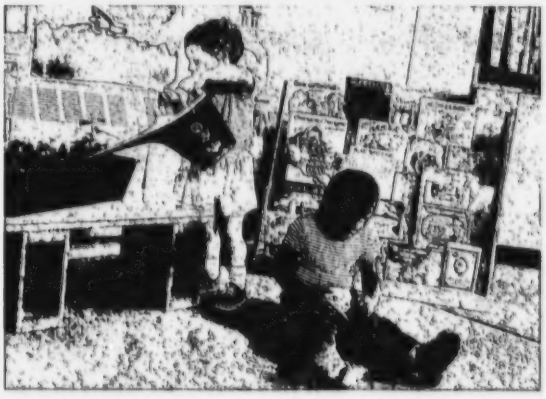
Props: toy characters and props (commercial or homemade) for re-enacting stories, such as three billy goats, a troll, a bridge; three bears, their chairs, bowls, beds, and a little girl; Max and the "wild things"
Flannelboard and felt pieces

Writing materials

Unlined paper of all colors, shapes, sizes
Memo pads, notebooks, envelopes
Multicolored pencils, pens, markers, crayons
Pencil sharpener
Stickers, stamps, ink pads
A sturdy, working typewriter

Office materials

Pads of lined paper
Notebooks
Bank books
File folders
Stationery and envelopes
Coupons
Computer keyboards



A forward-facing book rack makes the reading selections easy to see.

Reading and writing materials in other interest areas

Computer area: Computers equipped with age-appropriate software, including word processing programs, talking word processer, story programs, drawing programs

Sand and water area: Plastic food containers and lids, measuring cups with symbols, numbers, and/or words on them

Block area: Original toy boxes, maps, photos of buildings and block structures

House area: Food boxes, cans, bags, labeled grocery bags, receipts, recipe books and cards, menus, appliance instruction books, magazines, newspapers, comics, coupons, catalogs phone books, emergency decals for phones, family photos, eye charts, plane tickets, luggage tags, travel brochures, business cards, computer keyboards, typewriters, adding machines

Art area: Magazines, cards, junk mail, book-making and writing materials

Toy area: Original toy boxes, playing cards, magnetic letters

Woodworking area: Tool catalogs, home repair magazines, picture reference books such as *The Way Things Work* by David Macauley

Music and movement area: Tapes, records, compact disks

Outdoor area: Colored chalk, gardening books, seed packets, insect guides, bird guides, tree guides

Materials that encourage cooperative play and conversation

Heavy awkward things (appliance boxes, logs, boards, heavy blocks)
Large items that can be filled and emptied (wagons, wheelbarrows, tents)
Water-related materials
Real utensils and tools

Materials for reading and writing with symbols and pictures

Wipe-off class message board
Small personal wipe-off boards for children
Charts (snack chart, daily routine chart, chart of children's personal symbols)
Labels that include pictures and symbols (and occasional words) to identify where toys and materials are stored and children's personal storage spaces
Classroom signs that include pictures or symbols and words, such as those for the interest areas

Children are eager to try their own hands at writing when the environment includes writing tools, symbols, books, and other print materials.

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High/Scope

PRESCHOOL Key Experiences

Language and Literacy

Recognize and support these important learning experiences in the classroom, center, or home!

Learning to use language in all its forms is one of the most important areas of development for preschoolers. To develop their language abilities to the fullest, preschoolers need experiences with both spoken and written language. Using the ideas in this booklet, you can help preschoolers expand their conversational abilities and encourage them to discover the usefulness and fun of the written word. Suggestions are provided for promoting the following six **High/Scope key experiences in language and literacy:**

- Talking with others about personally meaningful experiences
- Describing objects, events, and relations
- Having fun with language: listening to stories and poems, making up stories and rhymes
- Writing in various ways: drawing, scribbling, letterlike forms, invented spelling, conventional forms
- Reading in various ways: reading storybooks, signs and symbols, one's own writing
- Dictating stories

Using these experiences as a framework, you can help preschoolers develop as successful communicators and lay the foundations for their success in reading and writing. Also included are checklists of teaching strategies and materials for promoting language and literacy experiences.

HIGH/SCOPE PRESS
a division of High/Scope Educational Research Foundation
600 North River Street, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198-2898
Orders: 800/40-PRESS, FAX 800/442-4FAX
www.highscope.org

ISBN 1-57379-097-90

9 781573 790970

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
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EFF-089 (1/2003)

P2C031499

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Date Filmed
April 21, 2004